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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 001192

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TFH01: NATIONAL PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE PEPE LOBO

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary. National Party candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo is the presidential candidate who, two weeks away from election day, polls suggest is on track to win the election scheduled for November 29. Lobo's pledge to Hondurans is that he will improve families' finances, generate employment and higher salaries, ensure law and order, and provide access to better education and health services for an overall improvement in the quality of life. Lobo's platform is not drastically different from that of the other presidential candidates. He is not particularly charismatic. But, he has benefited from the country's political crisis which has fractured the Liberal Party into factions run by President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya, de facto regime leader Roberto Micheletti, and his chief campaign rival Elvin Santos, belong. In the eyes of many Hondurans, the Liberal Party is to blame for the crisis and Lobo, as the candidate of the country's other large party, is the natural alternative. Lobo is blessed with an excellent team of advisors, which will make for a strong executive cabinet. He is also pro-U.S., pro-business and has a close relationship with the Ambassador. End Summary.

12. (C) National Party presidential candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo is currently the front runner. Lobo surged ahead of Liberal Party candidate Elvin Santos after the June 28 coup d'etat fractured the Liberal Party. Lobo is running for president for the second time after having handily defeated all other National Party candidates in the November 2008 primary election.

13. (C) In the aftermath of the coup, Lobo did not clarify whether he supported the de facto regime or the removal of Zelaya. Lobo announced his support on June 4, 2009 for Zelaya's plan to carry out a poll on June 28 asking whether there should be a referendum on a constituent assembly at the general election scheduled for November 29. After opposing the idea for months, Lobo told the Embassy that he supported Zelaya's initiative because polls suggested that the survey was popular with the public, although the public did not support modifying term limits to allow Zelaya to run for another term. Lobo's intent appeared to steal the idea from Zelaya without directly confronting him. Given the overwhelming control of the Congress by moderate members of the Liberal and National parties, Lobo was confident that he would be able to create a regulatory and legal framework which would immunize the referendum from what he believed was an attempt by Zelaya to subvert the constitutional order to stay in power. Lobo was absolutely convinced that President Zelaya's Fourth Urn proposal was a cynical attempt for him to

prevent the holding of elections and stay in power.

The Candidate

¶4. (C) Lobo is affable and known as a man who will do what is necessary to get things done. He is viewed as a pragmatic and ambitious politician and a shrewd businessman. Lobo's 2005 presidential campaign was based on job security, a tough stance on crime, and the reintroduction of the death penalty.

Lobo lost to Zelaya in a closely contested race in which he received 46.2 percent of the popular vote compared to Zelaya's share of 49.9 percent. Due to the narrow margin, Lobo refused to concede until ten days after the election. After his 2005 loss, Lobo served as President of the National Party until November 2008 when he once again became the National Party's presidential candidate. Lobo also served as President of the National Party from 1999 to 2001 and as an alternate representative in the Central American parliament from 2001 to 2006. Lobo served as the President of the Honduran National Congress from 2002 to 2006, under the administration of President Ricardo Maduro, to whom he was reportedly very close.

¶5. (SBU) Lobo was first elected as a member of Congress in 1990 and served two consecutive terms through 1998 and was elected again in 2002. Lobo was in charge of the Honduran Corporation for Forestry Development (COHDEFOR) from 1990 to ¶1992. Lobo was reportedly considered to have a good understanding of the forestry sector, but received poor marks for his management of COHDEFOR because he spent a great deal of his time focused on politics.

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¶6. (U) Lobo's political career started at the age of 19. From 1967 to 1970, he served as President of the National Party Youth Movement in the Department of Olancho. He served as President of the governing body of the Department of Olancho from 1986 to 1994 and as President of the governing body of Juticalpa from 1970 to 1973. Lobo was a member of the Association of Livestock Owners and Farmers of Olancho and the Committee of Defense of Human Rights of Honduras (CODEH). He was also a founding member of the Lion's Club of Juticalpa.

¶7. (SBU) Lobo, who was born on December 22, 1947 in Trujillo in the Department of Colon, is twice divorced and remarried for the third time. He is Catholic and has 11 children. Although Lobo started with a modest inheritance, he developed his family holding in Juticalpa in the Department of Olancho into one of the largest grain and cattle producing ranches in Honduras. He worked as a teacher in Juticalpa for 11 years. Lobo attended San Francisco High School in Tegucigalpa and is a graduate of the University of Miami where he earned a degree in Business Administration. Lobo has a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Lobo speaks English, but remains uncomfortable using it in meetings with American officials. Lobo's father served as a congressman in 1957 and was a well-known politician in the Department of Olancho. Lobo's brother, Ramon Rosa Lobo Sosa, is a congressman representing the Department of Colon.

The Platform

¶8. (U) Lobo's campaign slogan is "Change Now" and his platform is based on three pillars: decent salaries, education with health, and security. Lobo has promised to set up a government of national unity and has pledged that half of his Cabinet will be composed of women. He promotes decentralization through capacity building of municipal institutions and gradual devolution of finances. Lobo proposes a free market system that is focused on improved quality of life and social justice. He believes investment

in Honduras should be predicated on assurance of creation of jobs that will provide a decent wage. He has pledged to support small and medium businessmen as well as farmers and to boost tourism. Lobo plans to create 800,000 new jobs annually in order to reduce by 10 percent both the unemployment rate and the poverty rate. He will modernize the country's energy sector and restructure the state power company (ENEE). Lobo, the former schoolteacher, has promised to improve the public school system, including making English language instruction compulsory in schools, hiring 21,000 new teachers by 2014, and setting up 400 new schools by 2015. He will launch a program for 600,000 families which will pay 833 Lempiras (circa USD 40) a month to single mothers if they promise to enroll their children in school. Lobo has pledged to improve pre-natal health and the conditions in which women give birth as well as to reduce diarrhea, respiratory infections and new cases of tuberculosis by 30 percent. He has promised to build four new hospitals and rehabilitate seven. Lobo has promised to fight narcotrafficking, terrorism, arms trafficking, illegal immigration, trafficking in persons, and vehicle theft. He will strengthen the penal system and the intelligence and investigatory capacities of the police. He will reform the judiciary and make it more independent in order to ensure that cases are decided more quickly. He has pledged to fight corruption.

The Advisors

19. (SBU) Lobo is an experienced and able manager and has surrounded himself with a capable group of advisors and technocrats. Lobo's closest advisors are his first vice presidential candidate and campaign manager, Maria Antonieta Guillen Bogran, Oscar Alvarez, whom Lobo has tapped to be his Security Minister, Tegucigalpa Mayor Ricardo Alvarez, and former Presidents of Honduras Ricardo Maduro (2002-2006) and Rafael Callejas (1990-1994). Maria Antonieta Bogran (whose sister is an Embassy employee), is a professor and a consultant on education projects. She earned a business management degree from the Autonomous University of Honduras

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and served as Executive Director of the Honduran Tourism Institute. Alvarez served as Minister of Security under former President Maduro and as Assistant Defense Attache at the Honduran Embassy in Washington 1986-1990. He was a law enforcement consultant for DynCorp 1999-2001 and worked closely with the Embassy's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP). He holds a B.A. degree from Texas A&M University and was the Honduran military's first Fulbright scholar, earning an M.A. degree from Johns Hopkins University.

110. (U) Lobo's other two vice presidential running mates are Samuel Armando Reyes and Victor Hugo Barnica. Reyes, who was born in 1976, is an agricultural engineer. He is currently serving his second term as a congressman representing the Department of Lempira. Barnica, born in 1949, is a physician who obtained his degree from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He served as a member of Congress representing the Department of Copan 2002-2005.

111. (C) Lobo is unabashedly pro-U.S. He travels frequently to the U.S., principally to Miami and New Orleans (where his sister lives). He maintains a very close relationship with the Ambassador and meets with him on a weekly basis. Lobo has told the Ambassador that if he wins the election he plans to restore the strategic ties that have existed between the U.S. and Honduras. He will also likely withdraw Honduras from the ALBA.

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